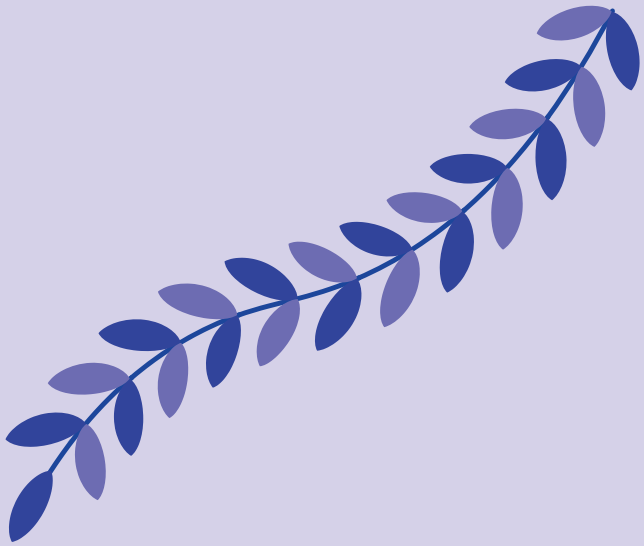
Liza de Groot

Storytelling as a form of therapy



A mini excericise book to re-write your life story, get to know yourself better and learn to appreciate yourself

Contents

About the book:	3
Writing excercise 1:	5
A little poem:	10
Writing excercise 2:	11
Writing excercise 3:	14
Writing excercise 4:	17
Writing excercise "The Future You":	20
Dreams and wishes and their meaning:	21
Your values are your core:	25
Conclusions:	28

Dear reader,

My name is Liza de Groot and I have written this little guidebook based on my own life experiences. I'm not a psychologist, nor therapist (though my friends and family often come to me for a piece of advice). I'm a highly sensitive person, who analyses a lot, overthinks reguarly and knows the highs and the lows of emotions.
The idea of this little excercise book came to me when I was presented with a very emotional situation: As a full-time care taker (my loved ones are both chronically ill), the war in my home country Ukraine with my mother living in the city where air assaults have become a norm, very busy work life with on some days lots of stress... As if it was not enough I've got to face the risk of losing a dear friend of mine to a terrible illness.

I've stopped asking myself **Why** I have to go through this long ago as it doesn't make sence. And honestly, being a person who loves life deeply, I still enjoy life a lot and consider myself generally a happy person.
But there is a shadow side to the story - I suppress my emotions. As this has become a habit of mine (probably a survival measure), I've started to worry I might "explode" one day. And a question rose: How do I process my emotions so that I find more peace, make space for some more joy and the feeling of fullfillment.
The answer was: **Tell my life story to myself**. And so it started: I've looked at Her, Liza, from the distance and my thoughts shifted from hyper focusing on my current situation to my life story in general. I immediately felt relief and started thinking of how writing my life story can not only help me process painful emotions but also find technics to deal with hardships. Let's try it together, you might be surprised, in a good way!

Before we start, I want to suggest you two strategies to write or re-write your life story.

The first one is writing a short (or long!) biography about yourself, in the third person. You give your hero (which represents yourself) a name and start telling about your life from the beginning. In your story you incorporate answers to the questions on the next page, prior to the writing space.

It's very important to include as many life experiences in your story as you can, so that you can see how much you've been through already. Some situations may remind you of your current siuation. See if you can find help by asking your younger self about how you've dealt with such a challenge or crisis back then.

Another really crucial part is describing your dreams and wishes that you had as a child, teenager and that you have now. Write about everything, no shame, radical honesty. Our wishes, urges and dreams tell us more about ourselves. They introduce us to our insecurities, to things we don't have enough of, to our values.

The other strategy is telling your story per life phase. There will be a separate page to you as a child, you as a teenager, you as an adult. Also, if you like fantasizing, a page for a future yourself.
Please, incorporate answers to the questions written at the top of each page.
This strategy starts at the page number 10.
Important: If writing is not an option, I strongly suggest you and the your person you trust tell your life stories to each other using the questions below. Alternatively, you can tell everything to a plush toy, or a picture of a dear one. But promise me: You will tell it out loud!

Strategy one
Put your name at the title on the next page

Questions:
How is your hero as a person now?
What did they look like as a child?
What were their favourite clothes?
Who was their super hero?
What were their favourite games?
How did they make friends?
How did they react when someone hurt them?
How did they stand up for themselves as a teenager?
What were their favourite things to do as a teenager?
Who did they look up to?

How did they deal with bad news or global problems as a teenager?
Which life events shaped how they perceive the world?
Which life events shaped how they perceived themselves?
As a child, teenager and adult: which difficult situations did they handle surprisingly well and how did they do it?
Which situations did they struggle with?
Did they find it easy to ask for help and do they find it easy now?

Now, let's start writing. I will give you three pages. Feel free to fill them on both sides or maybe, write everything down in a separate journal if you like.

Life of _____

Conclusions:

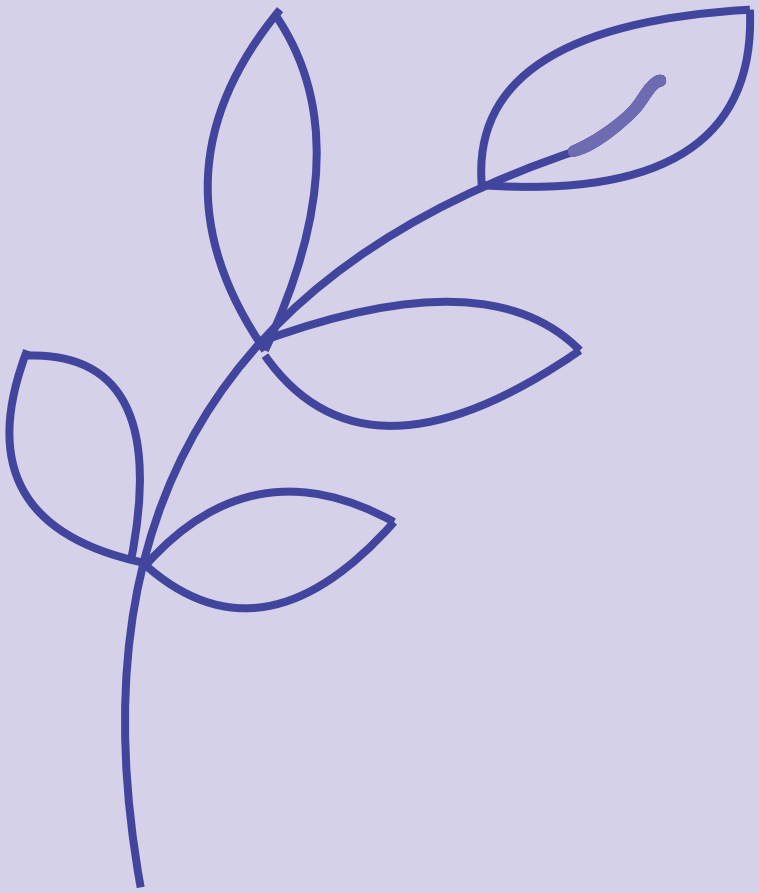
Which techniques your younger hero used to process emotions and to handle difficult situations?

Which of them worked well?

And how is your hero's current self overcoming hardships? What techniques do they use? Which ones are helpful?

Of all techniques which ones could your hero use more often to manage tough situations more confidently?

Don't forget: these techniques should be healthy and non-damaging to your health, and to others.



And now look:
How far you've come!
How much you've learned
And overcome!

Forgive yourself
The past mistakes.
'Cause in your life
They were "first takes".

No matter how old you are,
Remember: You can start a new
To walk the path to more delight,
Self-love and to a happier you!

Strategy two

Now, we wil write your story per life phase: child, teenager and adult.

This strategy is for those who find writing out one whole story tiring and difficult. Please, write the name of your hero in the title.

First, tell a story about your hero's childhood, based on these questions:

What was their personality like? Who was their hero? What lessons did they learn from their parents? Were these lessons helpful in life? What did your hero dream of? What games were their favourite? How did they make friends? How did they handle difficult situations? How did they react if someone hurt them?
If you've chosen this strategy, don't forget to fill in Conclusions on the page 8 after you've finished.

The Life of the little_____

Now, let's talk about the youth of your hero. What were they like as a teenager? What did they rebel against, even if silently? What kind of behaviour did they find unacceptable? How did they want to be treated? How did they solve conflicts? What did they do when they were scared? Did this strategy work for them to fight fear and insecurity?

As with the previous theme, write the name of your hero in the title and start writing their life story based on the questions above.

The Life of _____

The last writing excercise will be about your hero's adult years, about their Now.
How did their personality changed compared to the younger years? What behaviour of others they can not tolerate? How are they protecting their boundaries? How do they handle conflict situations now? Do they easily engage in discussions? Has their personality become more extraverted, intoverted or didn't change much? How do they react to hurtful words? What are their values now and how did they change compared to the younger years? What qualities do they value in others? When did they feel the most proud of themselves?

Please, don't forget to write the hero's name in the title and write about their current life based on the questions above.

The Life of _____

And now: What would your hero would be like in the future?
How will they handle conflicts, tension and fears?

The future of_____

Dreams and Wishes and Their Meaning

What do our dreams tell us about ourselves?

When Liza was a little girl, she dreamed of becoming an actress but also and astronaut. She loved building homes for Barbie dolls, constructing clothes for them, but also enjoyed playing with toy cars. What does it say about her personality?
Liza loves connecting with big groups of people and share her excitement with them. She feels the urge to express her creativity. She also loves exploring new places, loves making things with her hands and is interested in technologies or mechanics.

Our dreams and things that we love to do teach us about our values. What we find important in life finds its place into our wishes and dreams.

Her dream of becoming an actress made Liza write a musical as a child, set up small theatrical performances with her neighbour who was a bit younger and also into acting. Performing before the public made her feel connection with the others and the magic of it. She discovered how people can all share joy together, how they can ejoy the same things intensely.
Which resulted in: Following acting courses in her teenage years, constantly singing and playing in the music bands, performing at the clubs.
In her adult years connecting with others to play music together has helped to heal her depression as the only working strategy!

Currently, Liza sees it as her life mission to read the fairy-tales she writes out loud to children and adults to spread the ideas of caring for the nature and each other, self-love, real friendships.

How can this strategy of connecting with others through acting, music an speach help her cope with diifficult and stressful situations?

She can try to write a short story or fairy tale about a magical princess who overcame all the hardships like a real super hero and read it aloud to herself and others.

She can also look up clubs where people gather for a group therapy and each one tells their story.
She can write a song about her emotions and record it and put it on the Internet.

She can look up an Internet community of people who are going through very hard times and ask them for advice. And in exchange share her tips and tricks that help her to stay sane.

Just one dream opens numerous possibilities of handling difficult situations. By deconstructing your dreams and wishies you learn more about yourself and what works for you. And everything that is good for you and nourishes your soul and suits your values, can help you get through your struggles.

And if we take a look at the things that Liza loved doing as a child, we will learn that creating something with her hands feels soothing for her and gets her into flow. That's when we ground, experience things on the physical level, learn their structure and texture. By engaging in crafts we get out of our head into our body. We focus on something else than our detrimental thoughts. And so, we start feeling better.

And now, let's look at our secret urges and wishes.

I truly believe that our urges and wishes teach us about something we lack. For example, constant urge to eat sweet can point the lack of "sweetness" in life. When you or others are being too hard on yourself, constant stress and fatigue, the need to get more energy.

When you feel attracted to the colours like pink and light blue, it may mean that you crave more softness in life. More leisure time and more rest.

Or maybe, you love watching series about big friend groups? Could it be that you secretly feel the lack of communication with friends and that you really need to be a part of a bigger community to feel happier?

Some other fears, like the fear of judgement or the fear of being rejected manifest as not daring to wear your favourite, happy, geeky (?) outfit in public, to close the page with an inspirational YouTube video you are watching the second someone looks at it.

What are your conscious desires and unconscious patterns?

Acknowledging them can make it easier to do what is right for you and take a better care of yourself. Which will help you deal with difficult situations in a way that is better for you.

YOUR VALUES ARE YOUR CORE

Your values are your core. They make the base of who you are as a person. If you know your values, what is important for you in how you treat yourself, others and the world and how others treat you, each other and the world, you will most likely make good and reasonable choices in life. Which helps when handling stressful situations. Your values will support you in making the right decisions.

When you know yourself as a person, know your normal reacting patterns and your values, you can predict how you will respond to one or another stress factor. And excatly this knowledge takes away a huge weight of being afraid of the unknown. Because now, there is something you definitely know: How you will cope with the hardships based on your self-knowledge, self-love and your values.

At the moment, I'm working with many clients in construction. People can behave very unreasonable sometimes and I had clients screaming at me, because they couldn't find some information in the offer, while the information was there. Or they misinterpreted my questions when choosing the right product for them, thinking we are not going to proceed with their project. At some point, I got so stressed out, I started to compulsively do everything to prevent these conflicts: Like working late, sending clients extra and extra updates about their order, waking up stressed and **expecting** someone will pour their frustration at me. This is an exhausting kind of life, to be honest. So, I've looked into my student years. How did I handle such unfair behaviour from others? And the anwers popped up immediately: I would stand up for myself and others and protect my boundaries most of the time. Our student group used to have a teacher who hated us and would call us idiots, stupid and other names. At some point, I've had enough of this. When she was scolding one of our best students, I stood up and confronted her. I've told that we are all doing our best as students and that is not fair we have to listen to these insults thrown at us, especially this girl who is really smart and working hard. This was the last time this teacher called us names.

When I thought back of this time, I've realised that Liza can be pretty fierce. So yes, I have everything in me to protect my boundaries and stand up for myself. I can make it clear that screaming and swearing is not how I want to be treated.

So, by remembering our skills that we might have forgotten, we can become more confident and handle stressfull situations much better!

Conclusions

Now, we've come to the end of this little handbook. What did you learn about your journey here? What did your life story and previous experiences teach you?

To me, the most important take-out is this:

If you know yourself well enough, you will be able to deal with difficult situations much easier!

This is because many situations in our life keep repeating themselves in one way or another. (I'm not talking about extreme situations, of course.) And even if they seem different, they probably awoke **similar emotions and feelings in you.**

So if you have managed a similar situation before, you will also manage it now. Whether you will use the strategy that worked previously, or will find a new one, because the last one wasn't helping, your life experience will help you to deal with it in the best way possible. Of course, we often cannot predict the result, but nevertheless, you can be sure, you've done everything depending on you to solve the problem. And then, your hero will surely level up!

I wish you all the luck, happiness and succes in the world. Take care of yourself. You are the person your hero will need all their life!

Thank you for reading!

The illustration on the cover is the property of Canva
The photos are taken by the author

© 2026 Liza de Groot